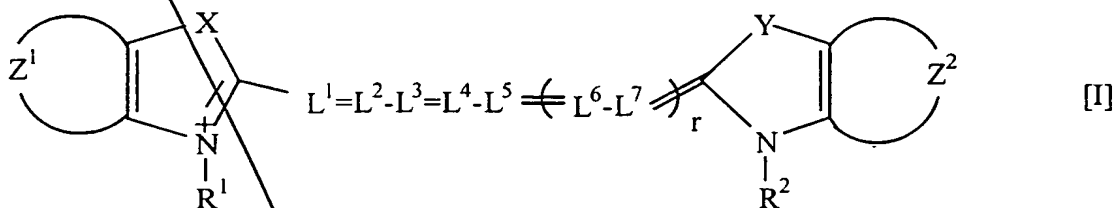
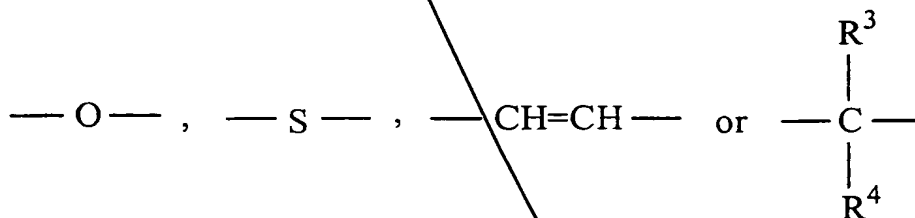


WHAT IS CLAIMED IS

1. A near infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising a compound having three or more sulfonic acid groups in a molecule, which is represented by the formula [I]



wherein R^1 and R^2 are the same or different and each is a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl; Z^1 and Z^2 are each nonmetallic atoms necessary for forming a substituted or unsubstituted condensed benzo ring or condensed naphtho ring; r is 0, 1 or 2; $L^1 - L^7$ are the same or different and each is a substituted or unsubstituted methine, provided that when r is 2, L^6 and L^7 that occur in duplicate are the same or different; and X and Y are the same or different and each is a group of the formula



wherein R^3 and R^4 are the same or different and each is substituted or unsubstituted alkyl, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

2. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of claim 1, which is free of a carboxylic acid group in a molecule.

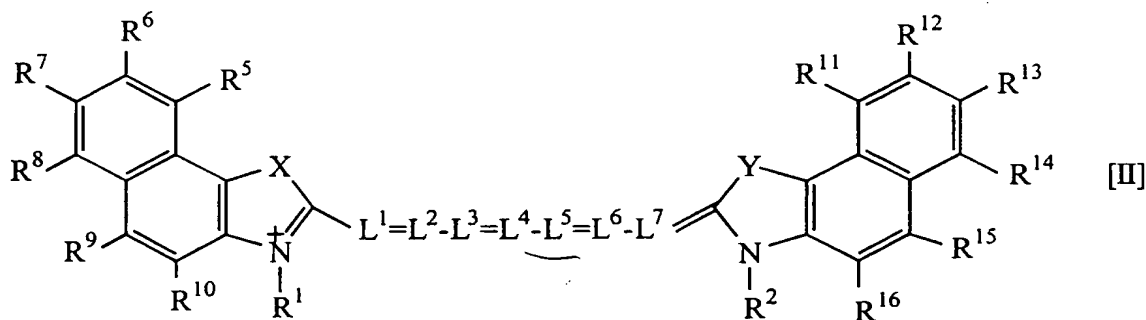
3. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of claim 1 or claim 2, wherein, in the formula [I], r is 1.

4. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of any of claims 1 to 3, wherein

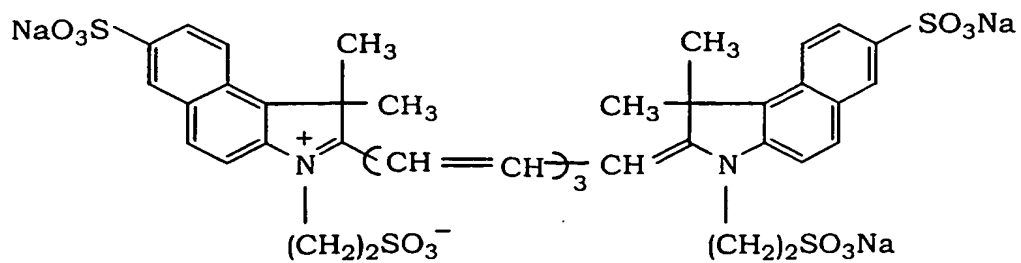
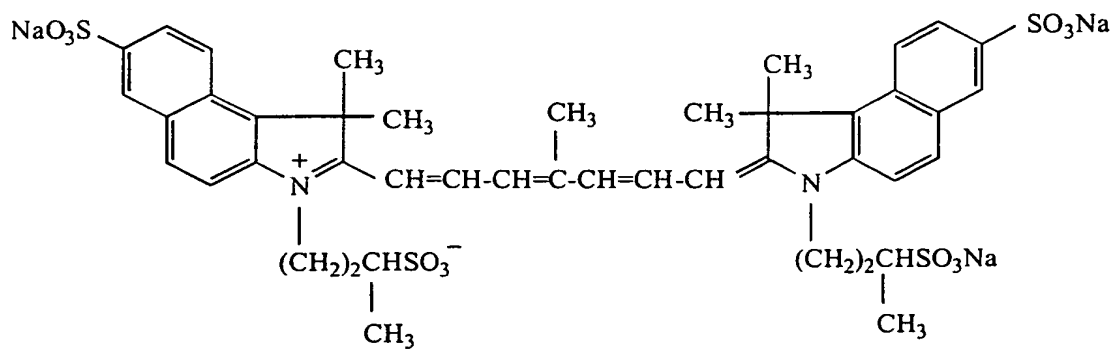
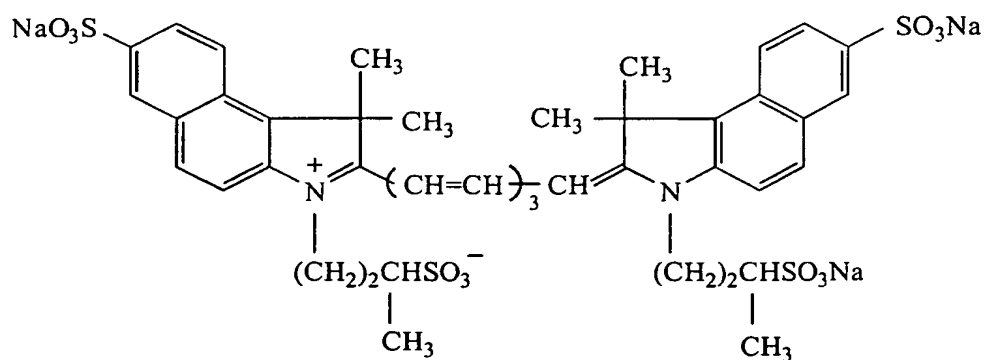
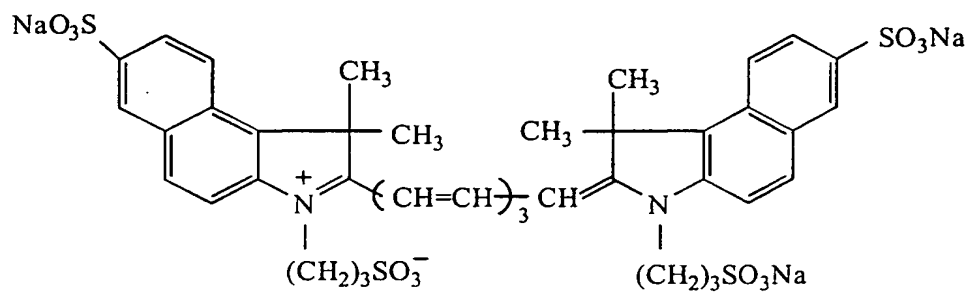
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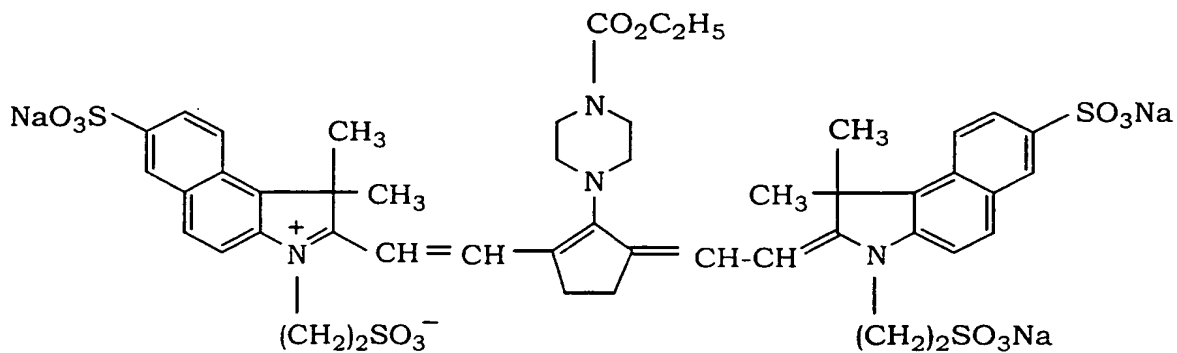
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- 4 or more sulfonic acid groups are contained in a molecule.
5. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of any of claims 1 to 4, wherein 10 or less sulfonic acid groups are contained in a molecule.
6. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of any of claims 1 to 4, wherein 8 or less sulfonic acid groups are contained in a molecule.
7. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of any of claims 1 to 6, wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable salt is a sodium salt.
8. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of any of claims 1 to 7, which is for tumor imaging.
9. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of any of claims 1 to 7, which is for angiography.
10. A sodium salt of a compound of the formula [II] having three or more sulfonic acid groups in a molecule

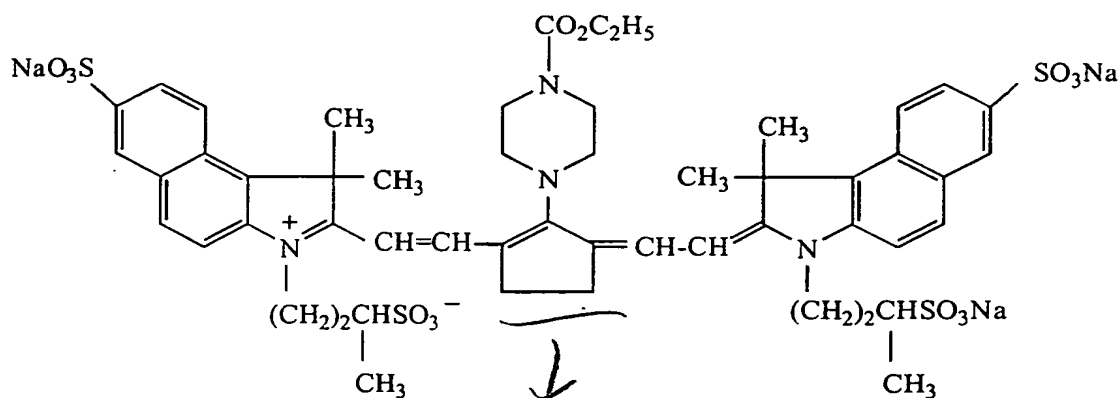


wherein R^1 , R^2 , $L^1 - L^7$, X and Y are as defined above; and R^5 to R^{16} are the same or different and each is a hydrogen atom, a sulfonic acid group, a carboxyl group, a hydroxyl group, an alkyl(sulfoalkyl)amino group, a bis(sulfoalkyl)amino group, a sulfoalkoxy group, a (sulfoalkyl)sulfonyl group or a (sulfoalkyl)aminosulfonyl group, exclusive of the groups of the following formulas



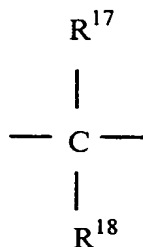


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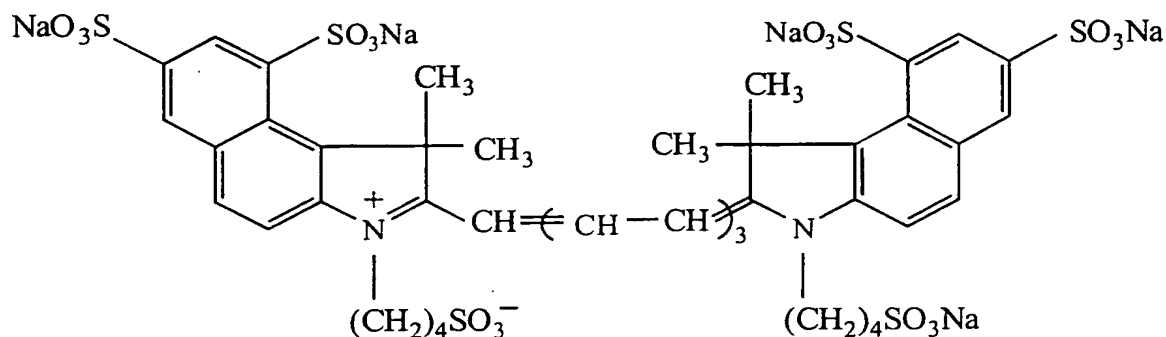
doesn't fall w/ Generic claim

11. The sodium salt of claim 10, wherein, in the formula [II], R^1 and R^2 are each a lower alkyl having 1 to 5 carbon atoms substituted by a sulfonic acid group and X and Y are the same or different and each is

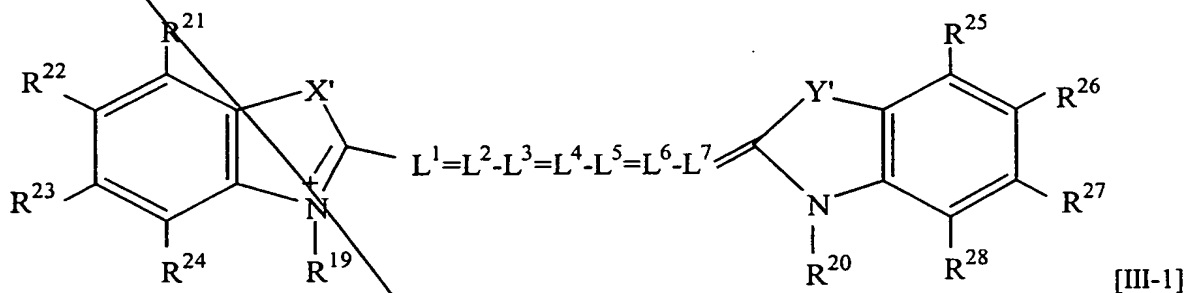


wherein R^{17} and R^{18} are unsubstituted lower alkyl having 1 to 5 carbon atoms.

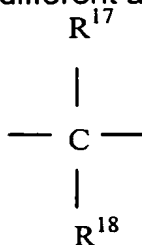
12. The sodium salt of claim 11, having the formula



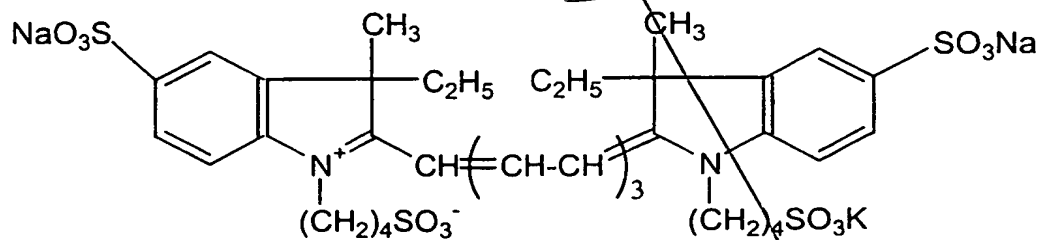
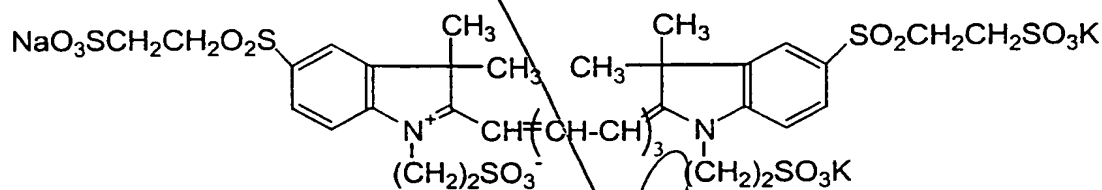
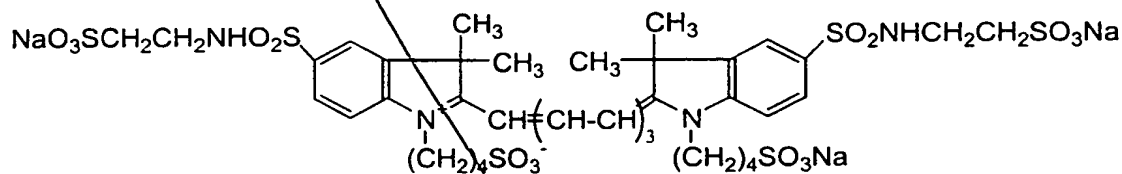
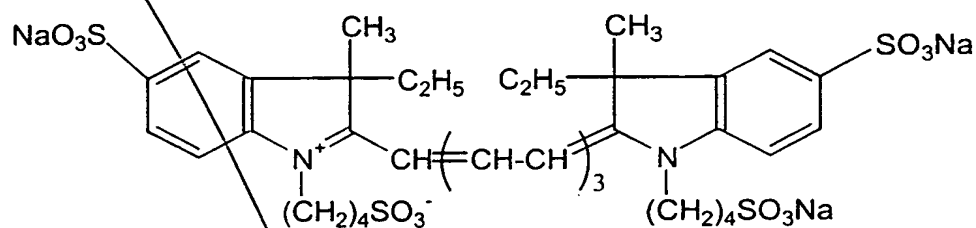
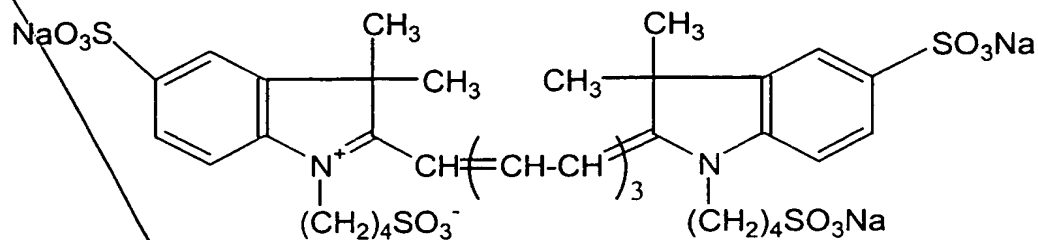
13. A sodium salt of a compound of the formula [III-1] having three or more sulfonic acid groups in a molecule



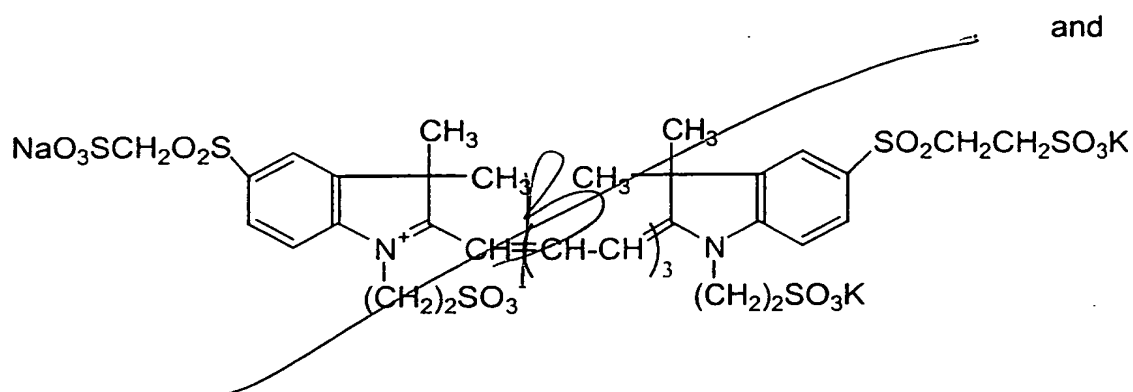
wherein L^1-L^7 are as defined above, R^{19} and R^{20} are lower alkyl having 1 to 5 carbon atoms and substituted by sulfonic acid group, $R^{21} - R^{28}$ are the same or different and each is hydrogen atom, sulfonic acid group, carboxyl group, hydroxyl group, alkyl(sulfoalkyl)amino group, bis(sulfoalkyl)amino group, sulfoalkoxy group, (sulfoalkyl)sulfonyl group or (sulfoalkyl)aminosulfonyl group, and X' and Y' are the same or different and each is a group of the formula



wherein R¹⁷ and R¹⁸ are as defined above, exclusive of the groups of the following formulas

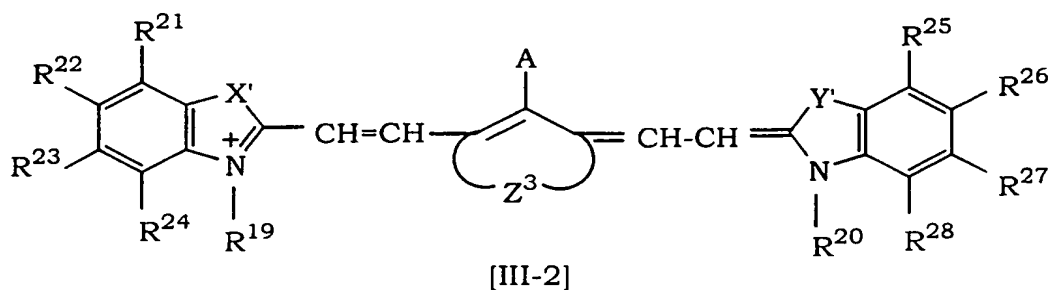


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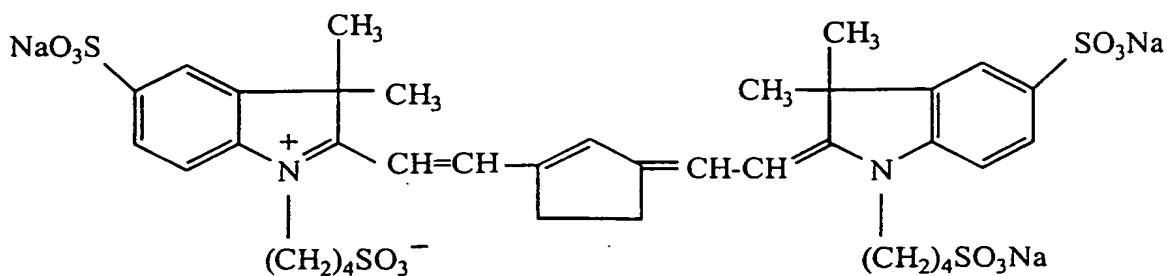
14. The sodium salt of claim 13, wherein, in the formula [III-1], L_4 is methine substituted by alkyl having 1 to 4 carbon atoms.

15. The sodium salt of claim 13, which is a sodium salt of the compound of the formula [III-2] having three or more sulfonic acid groups in a molecule

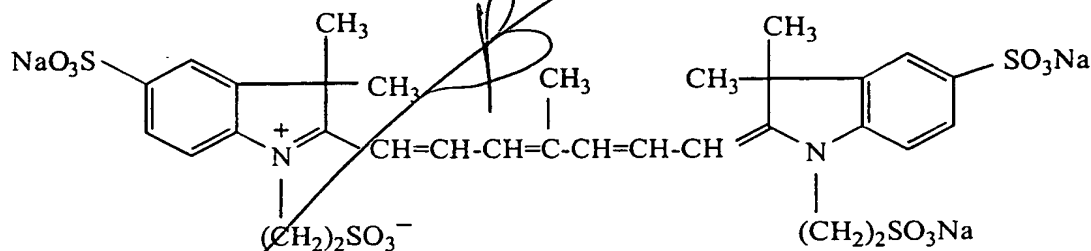


wherein $\text{R}^{19} - \text{R}^{28}$, X' and Y' are as defined above, Z^3 is a non-metallic atom group necessary for forming a 5- or 6-membered ring and A is hydrogen atom or a monovalent group.

16. The sodium salt of claim 15, having the formula



17. The sodium salt of claim 13, having the formula



18. The sodium salt of any of claims 10, 11, 13, 14 and 15, comprising 4 or more sulfonic acid groups in a molecule.

19. The sodium salt of any of claims 10, 11, 13, 14, 15 and 18, comprising 10 or less sulfonic acid groups in a molecule.

20. The sodium salt of any of claims 10, 11, 13, 14, 15 and 18, comprising 8 or less sulfonic acid groups in a molecule.

21. A near infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising the sodium salt of any of claims 10 to 20.

22. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of claim 21, which is for tumor imaging.

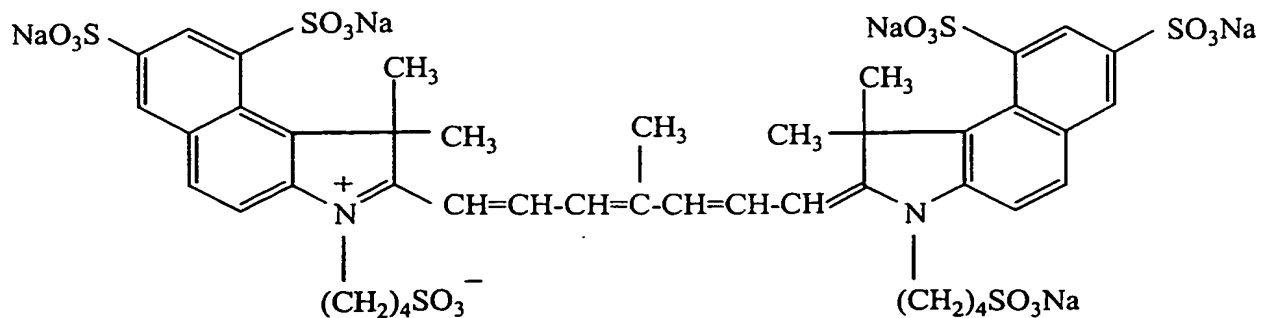
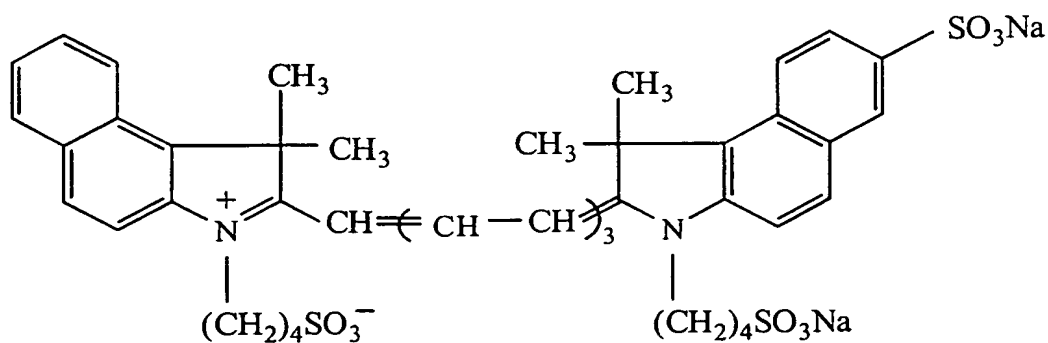
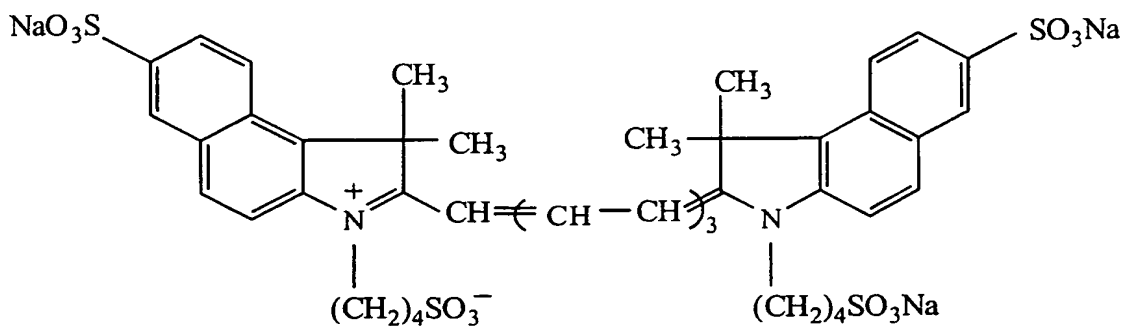
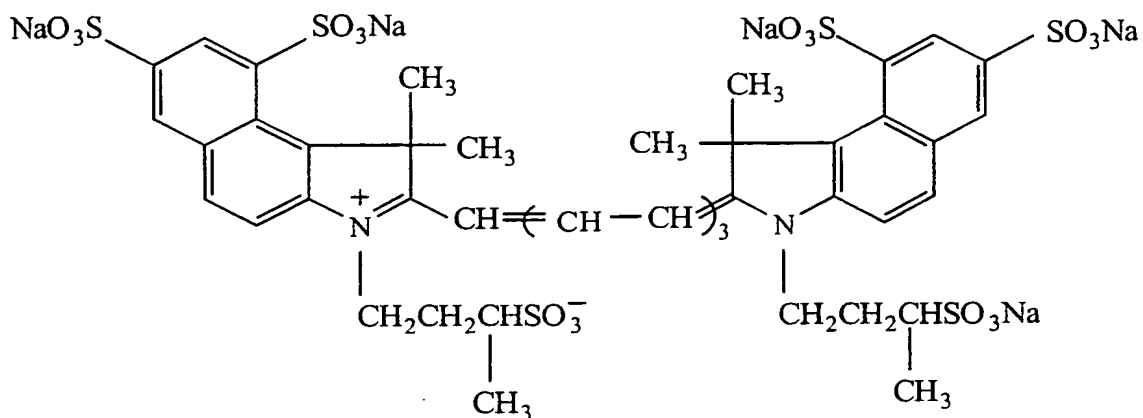
23. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of claim 21, which is for angiography.

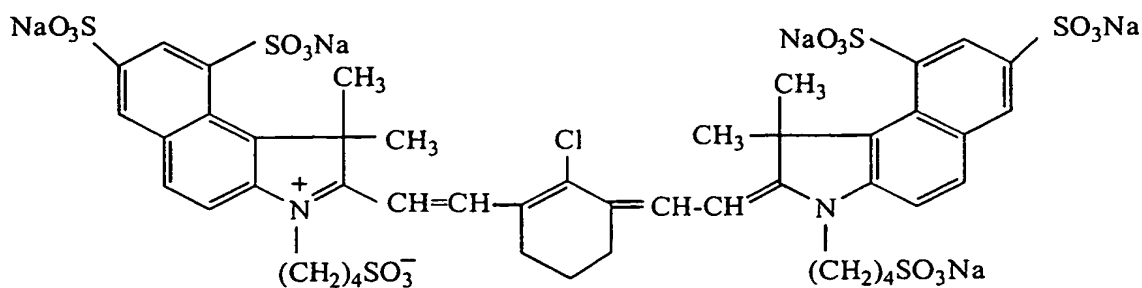
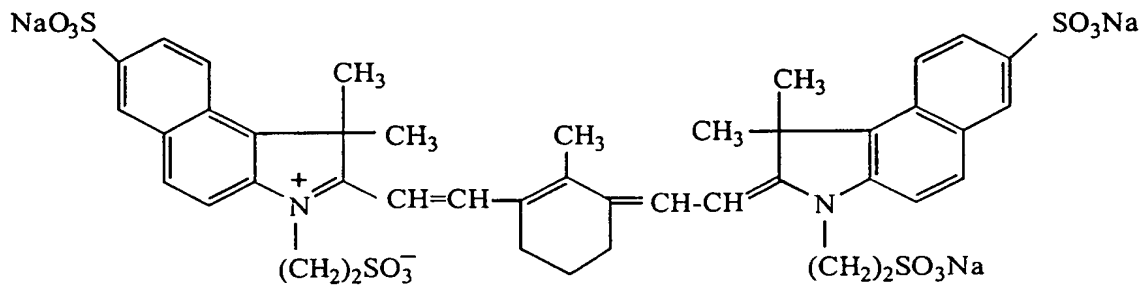
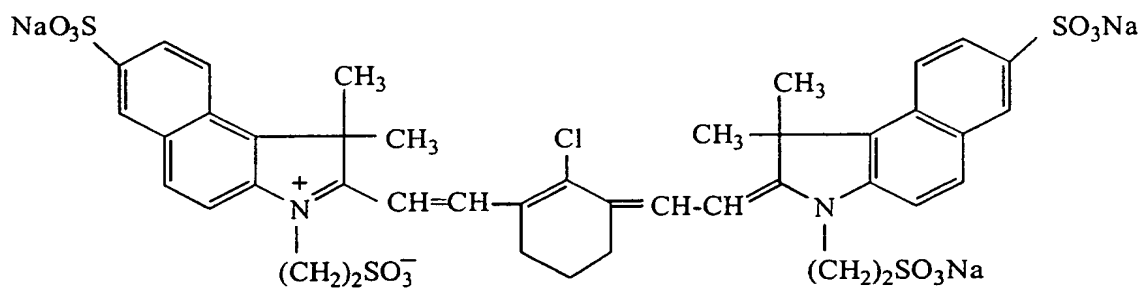
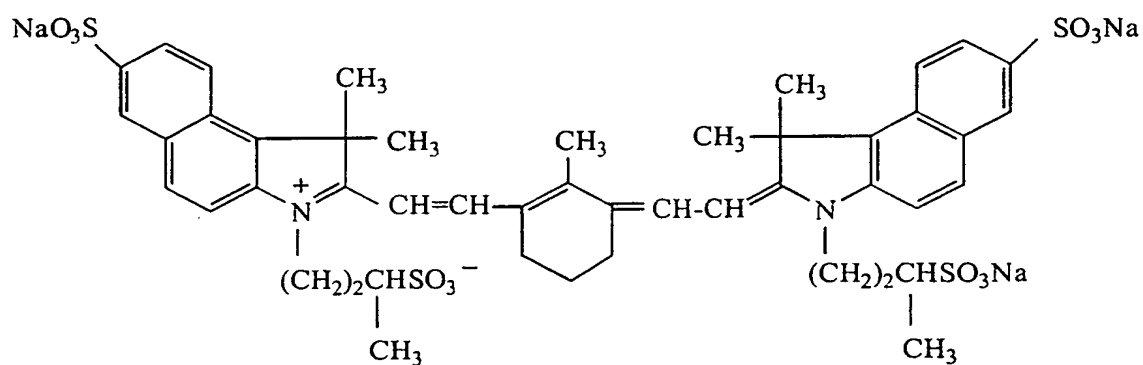
24. A method of fluorescence imaging comprising introducing the near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of claim 1 into a living body, exposing the body to an excitation light, and detecting near infrared fluorescence from the contrast agent.

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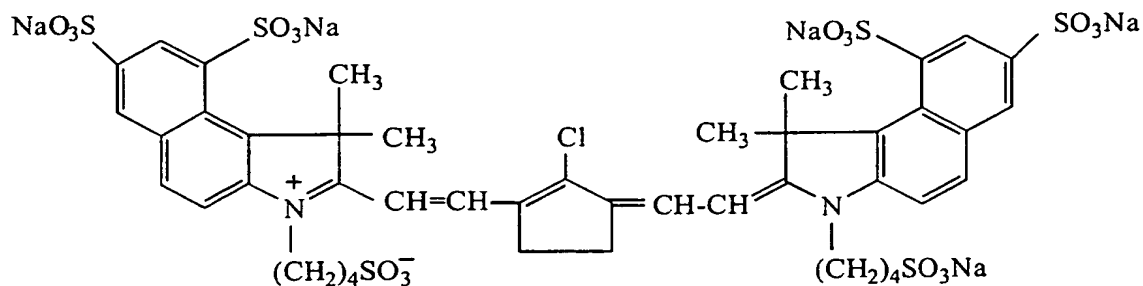
25. The sodium salt of claim 10, which is at least one member selected from the group consisting of the compounds of the following formulas



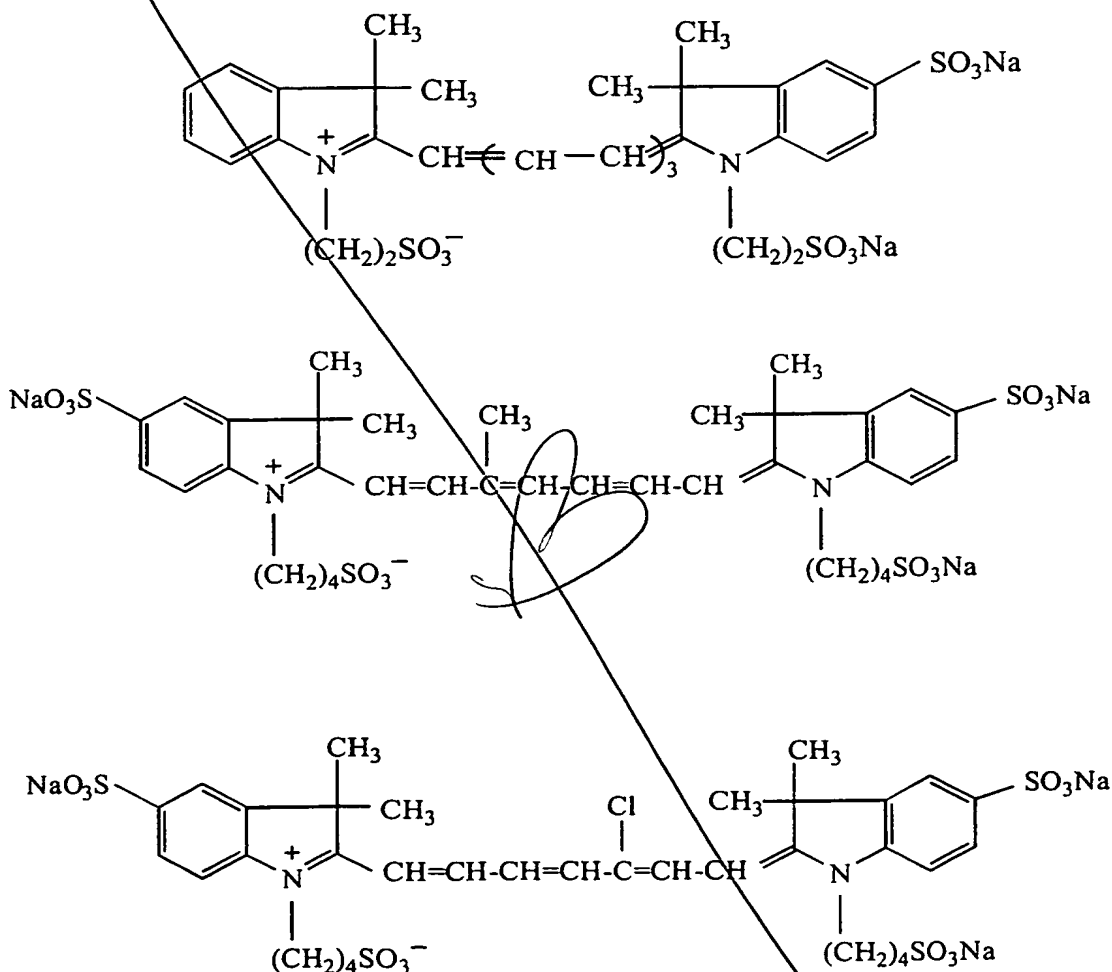


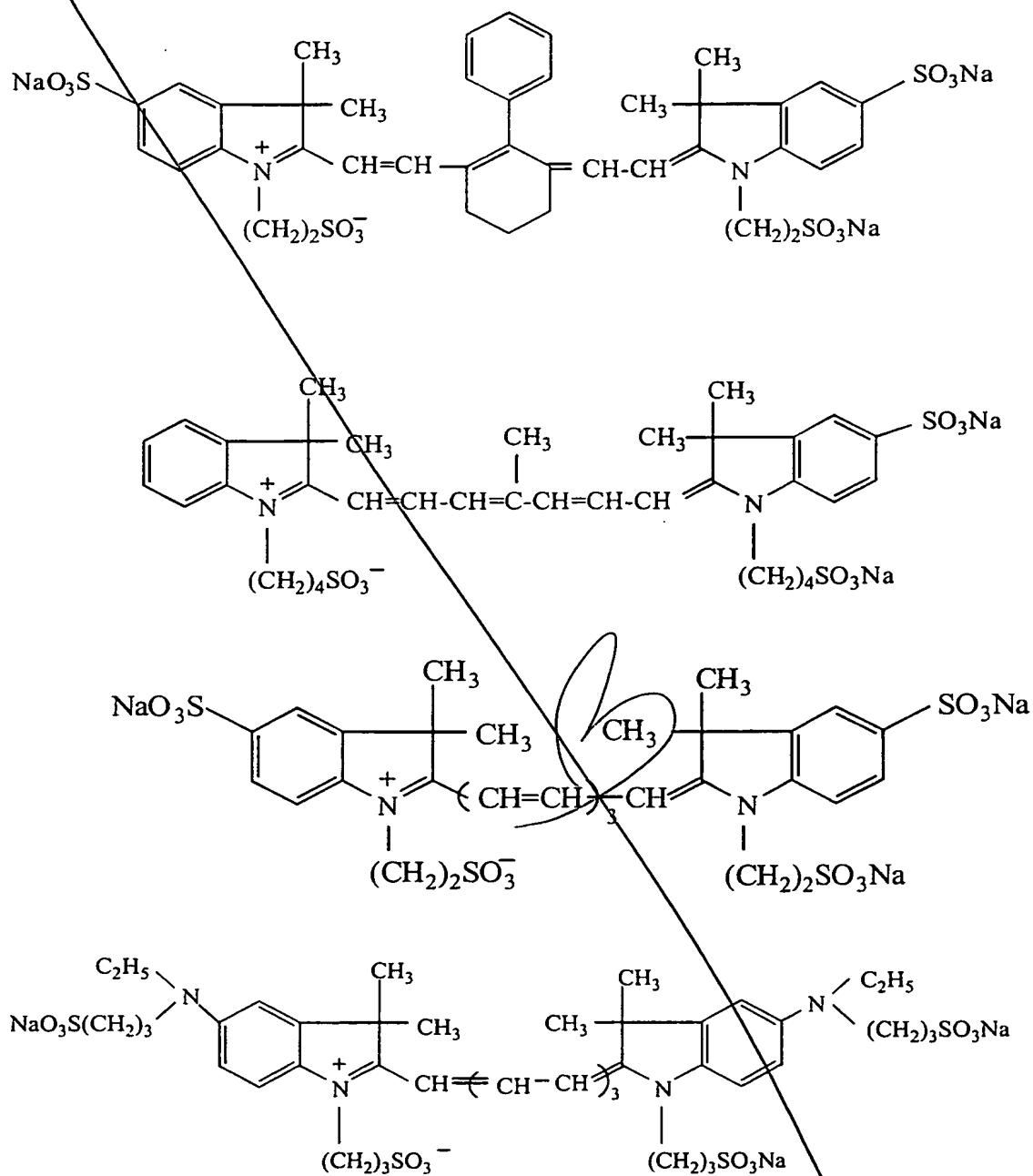
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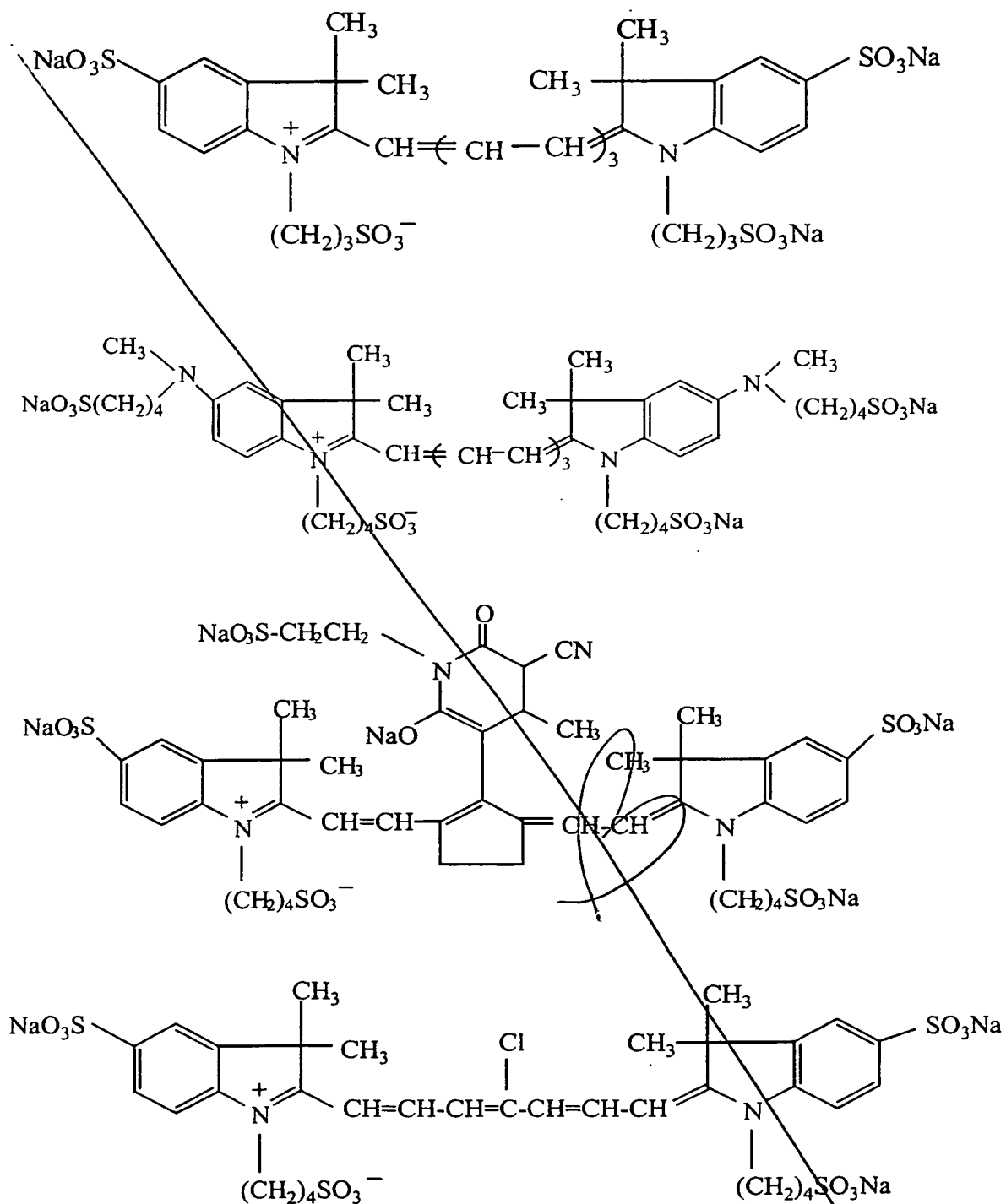
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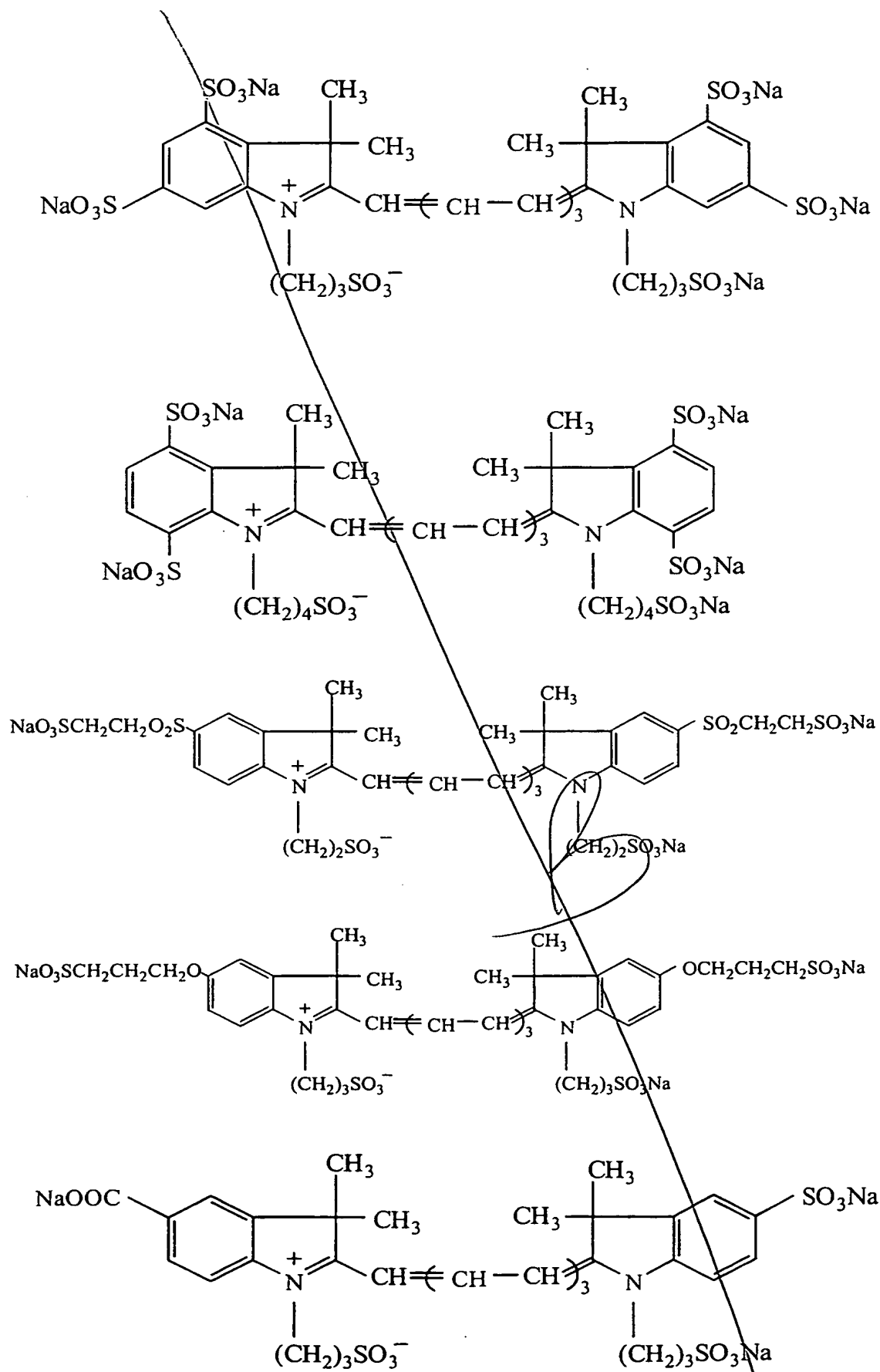
26. The sodium salt of claim 13, which is at least one member selected from the group consisting of the compounds of the following formulas

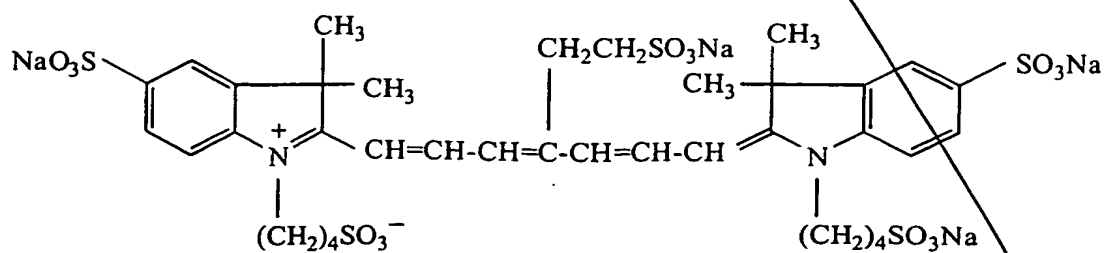
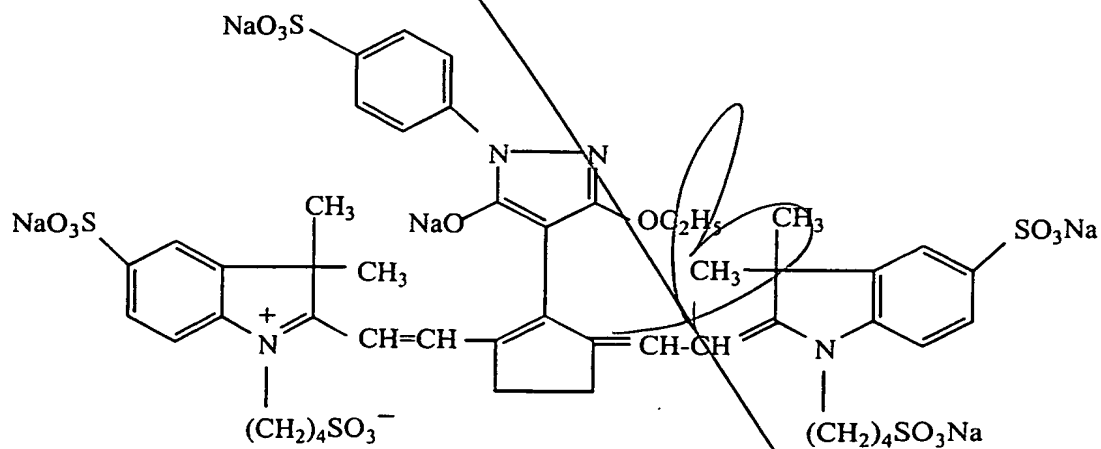
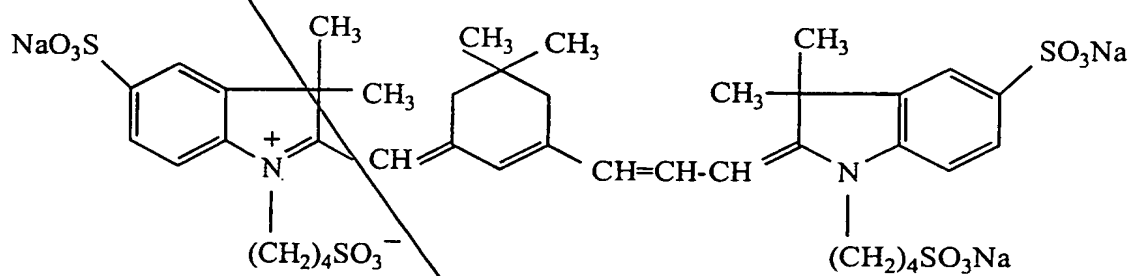
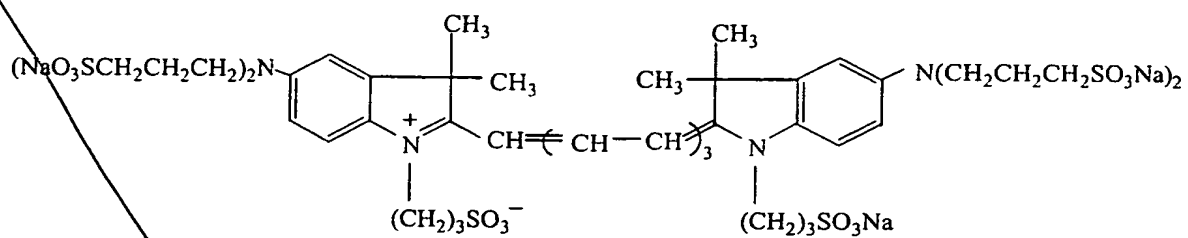




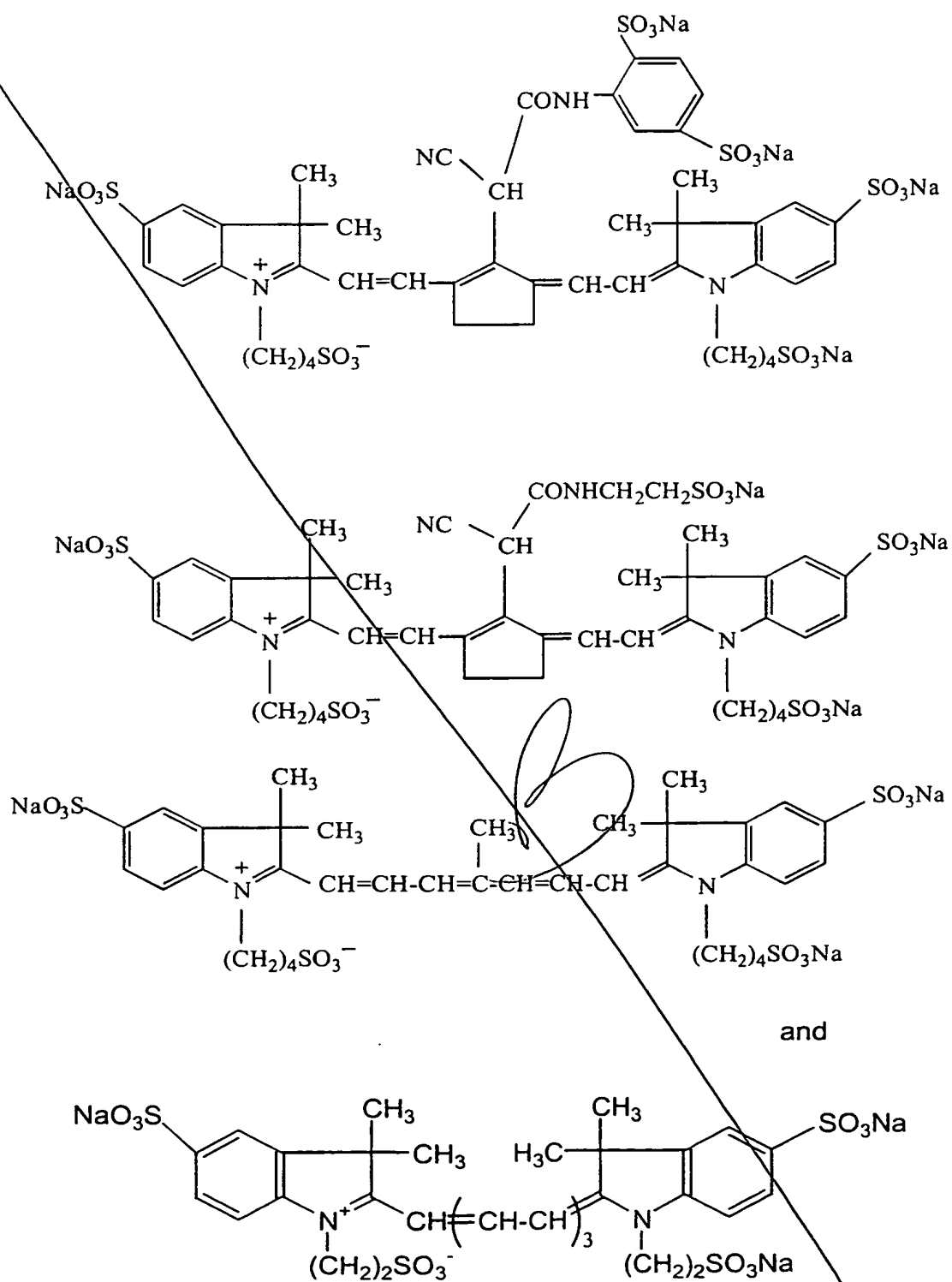


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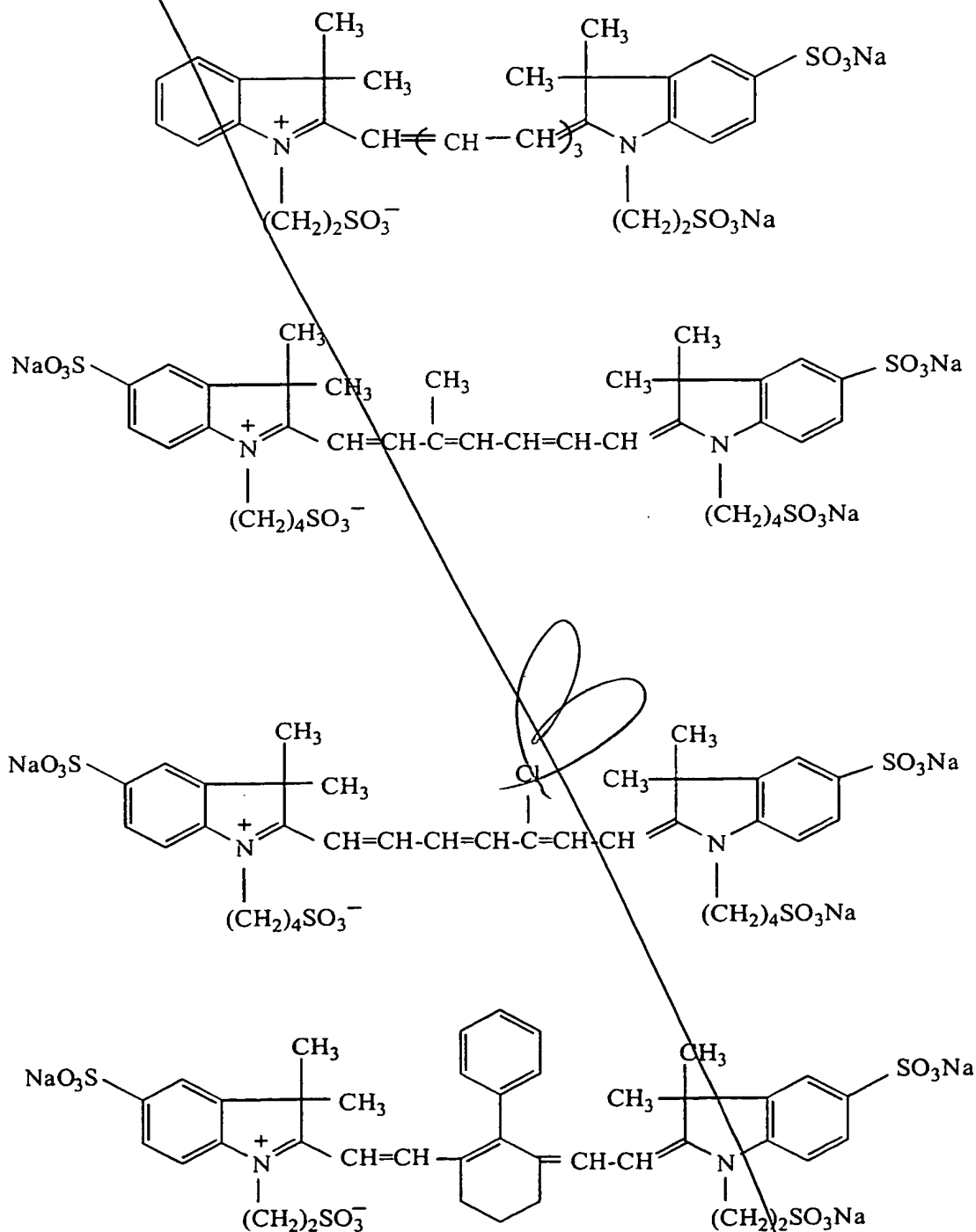


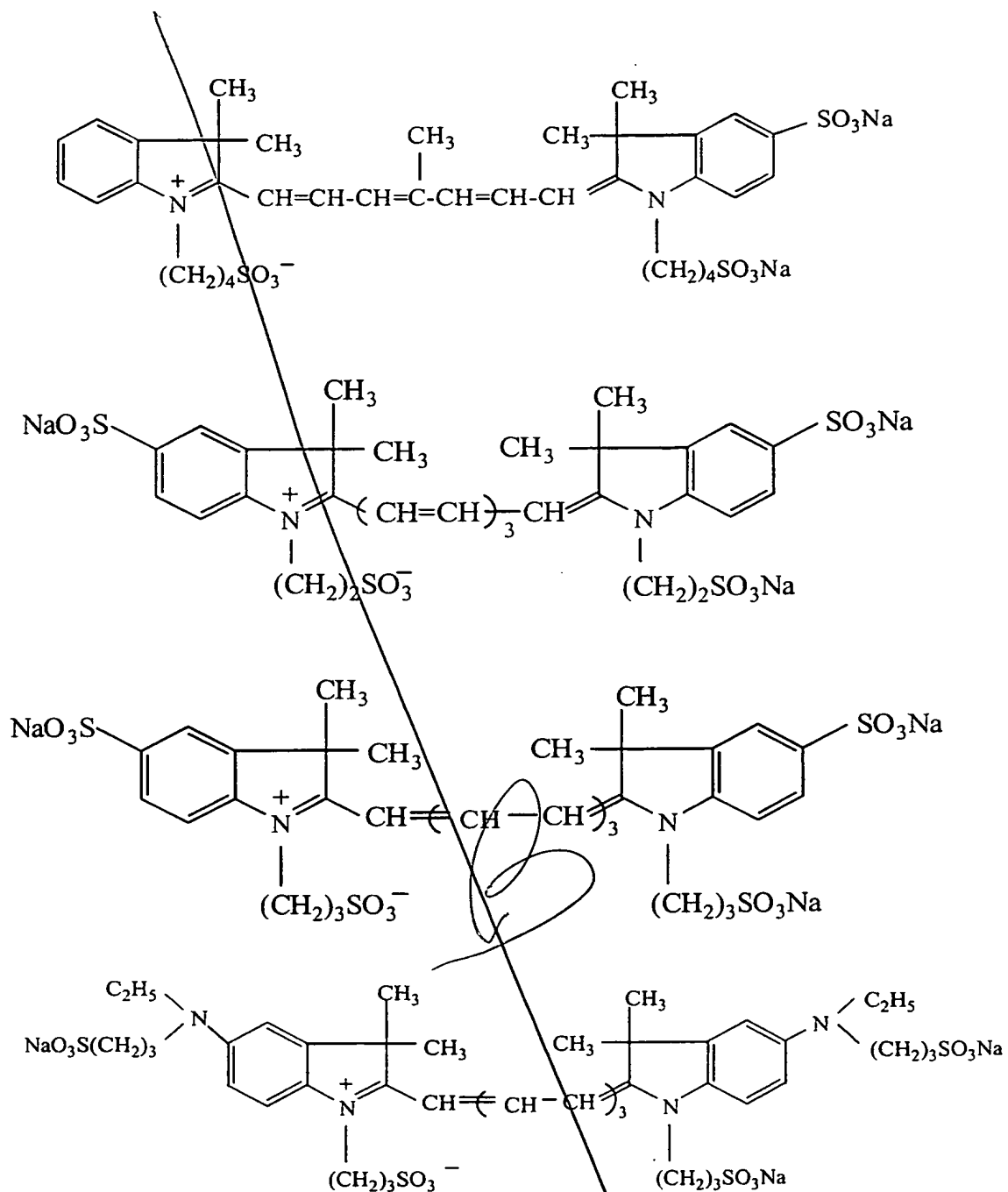


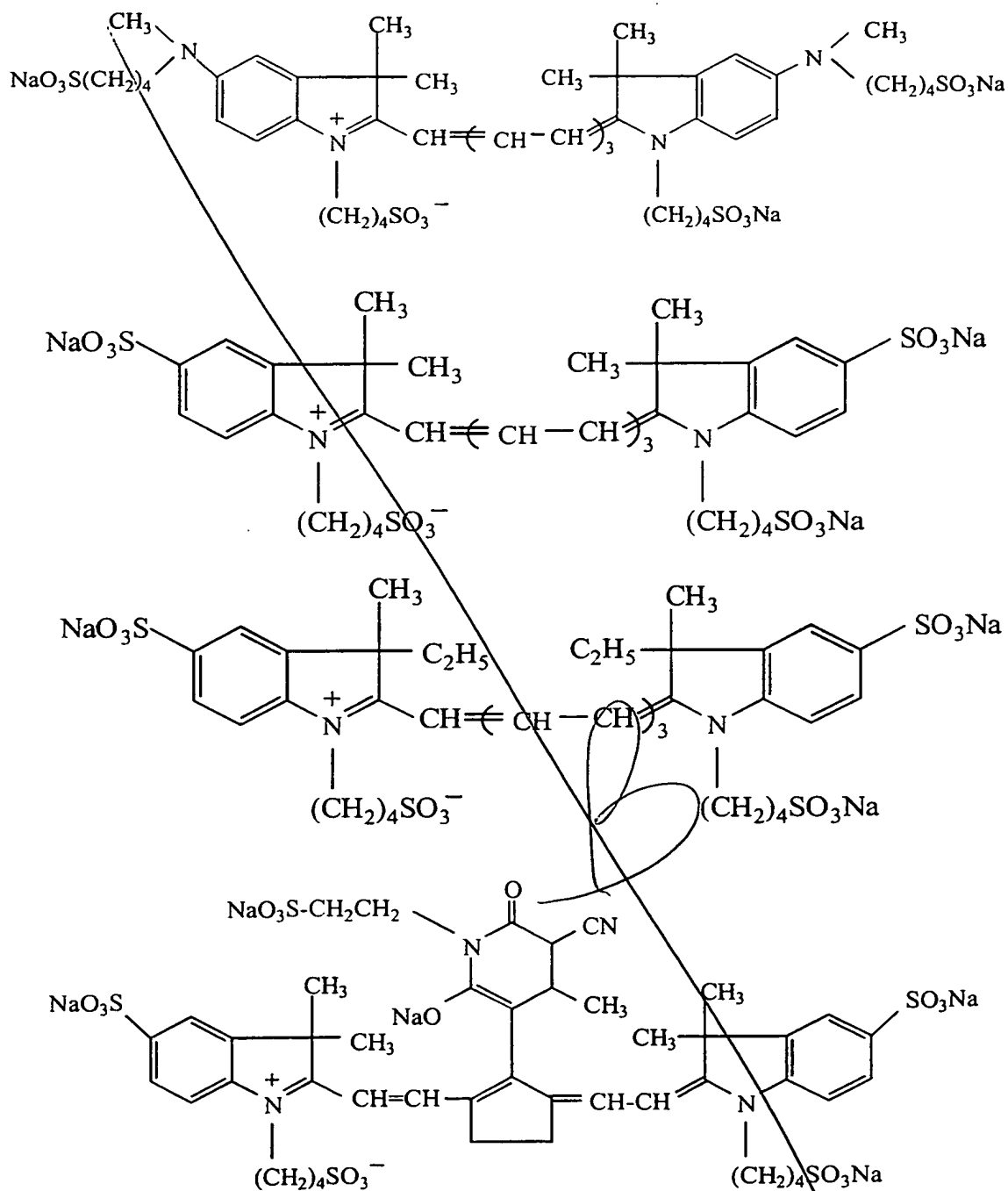
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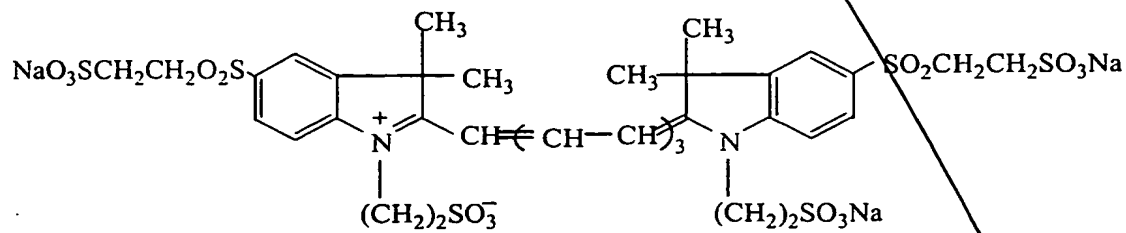
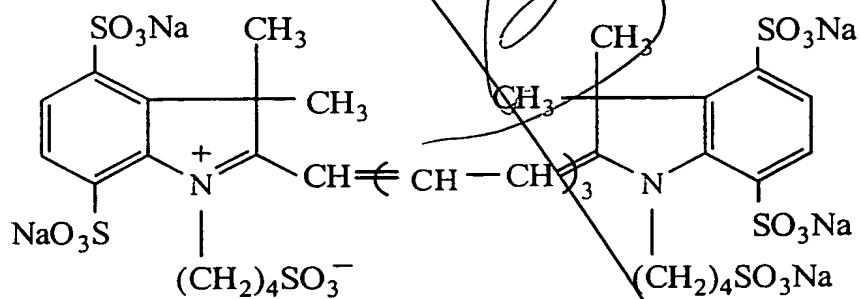
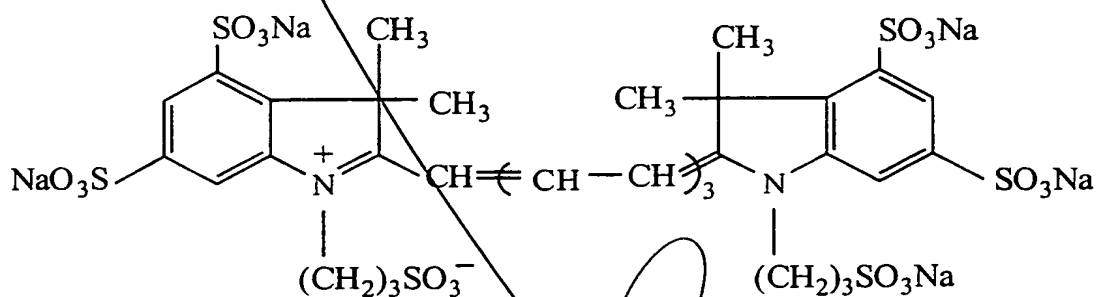
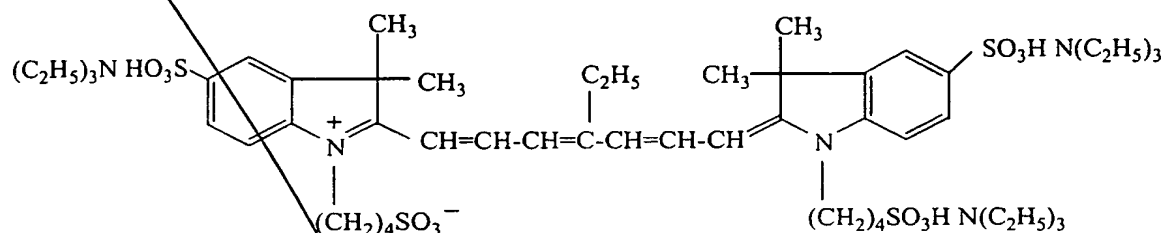
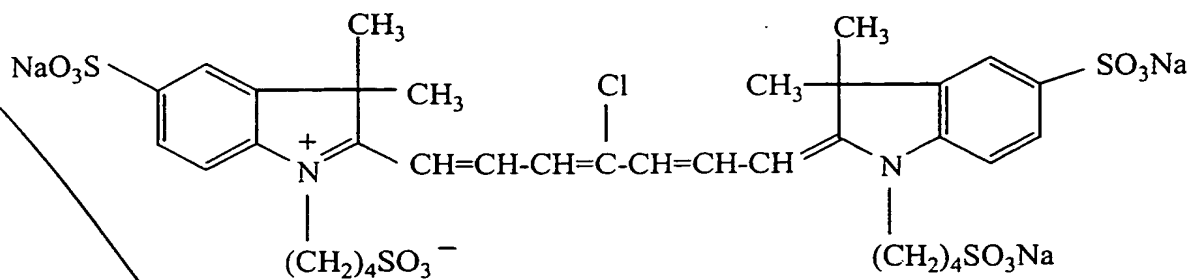
27. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent of claim 1, comprising at least one compound selected from the group consisting of the compounds of the following formulas



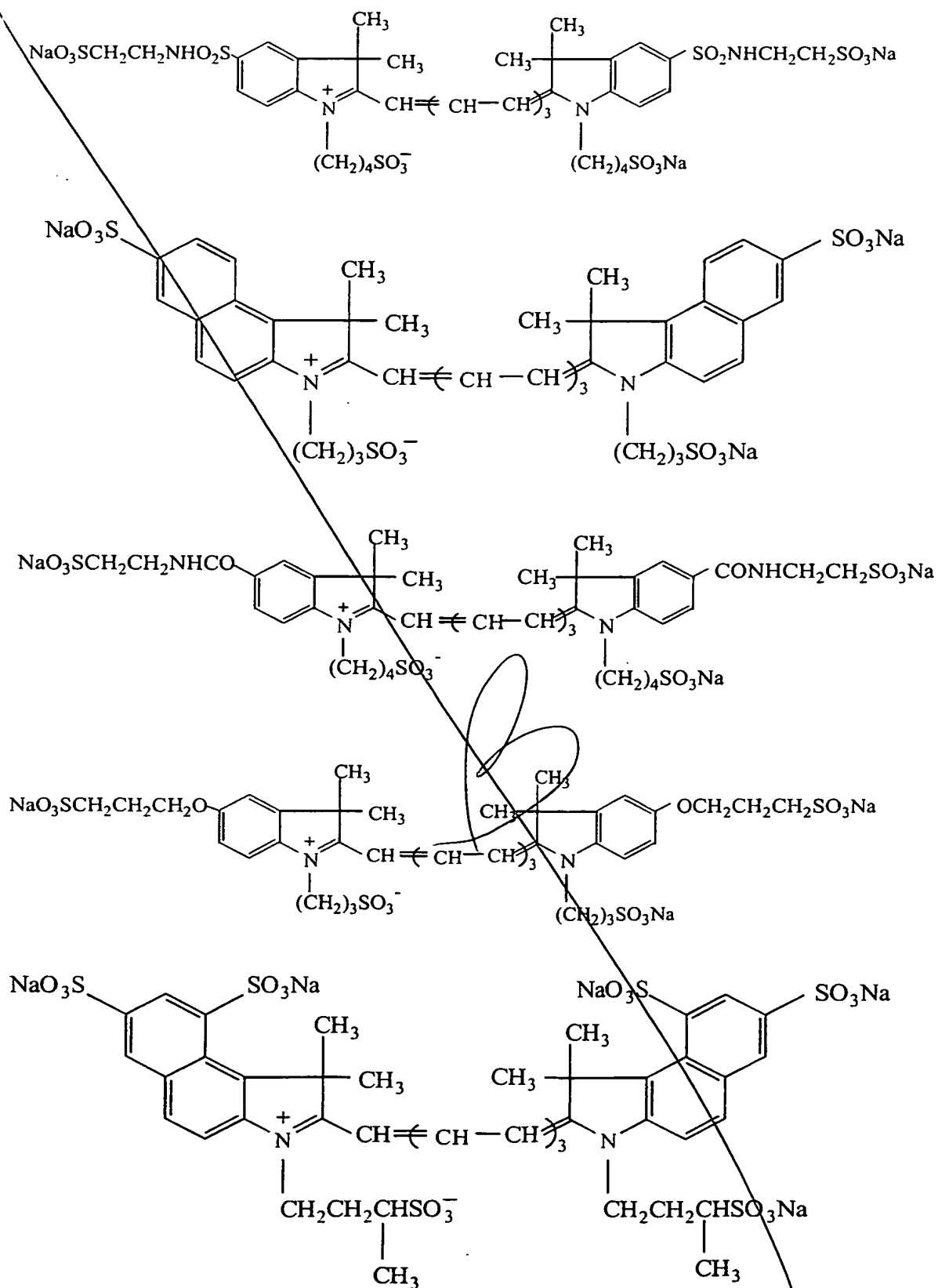


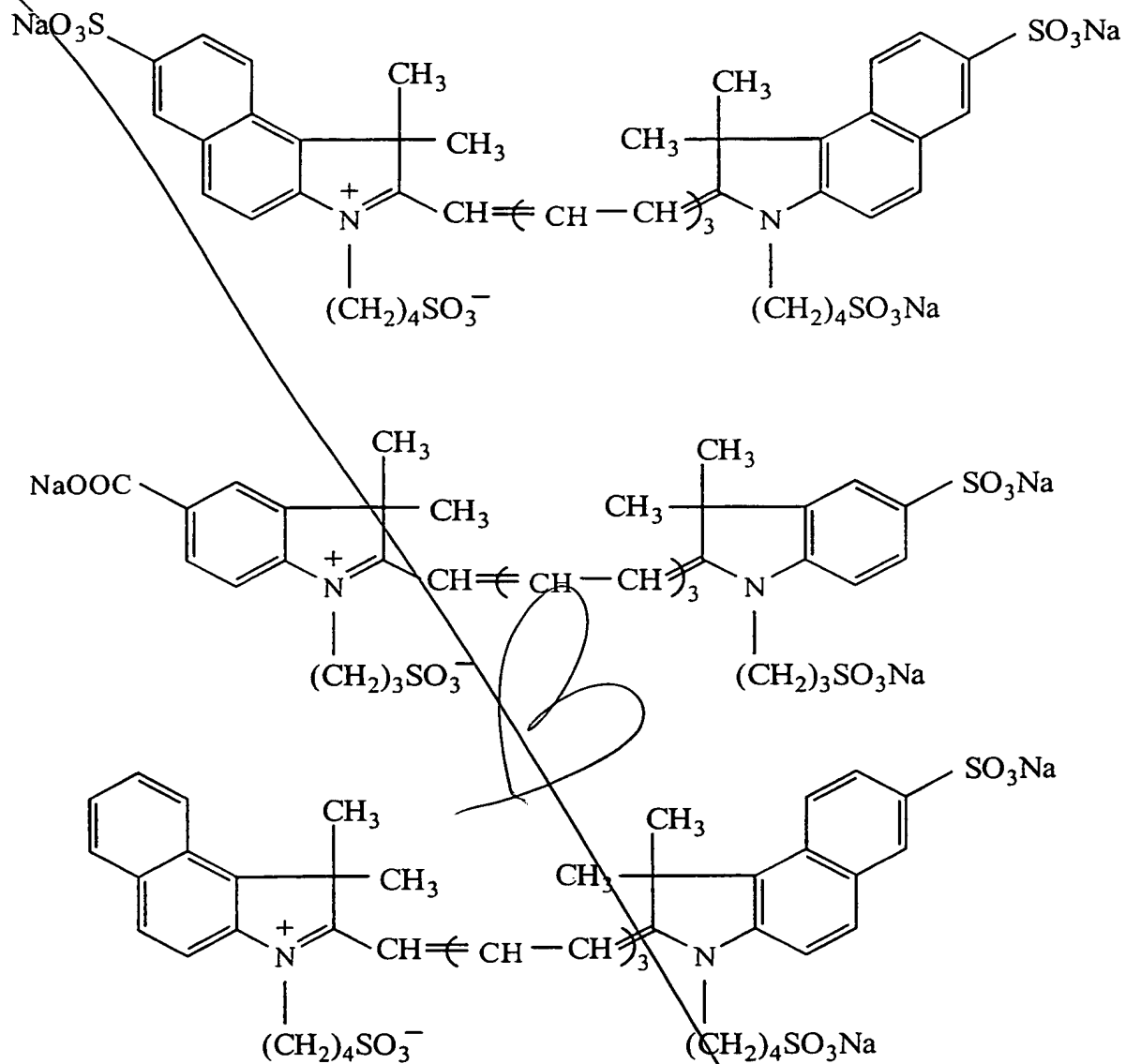


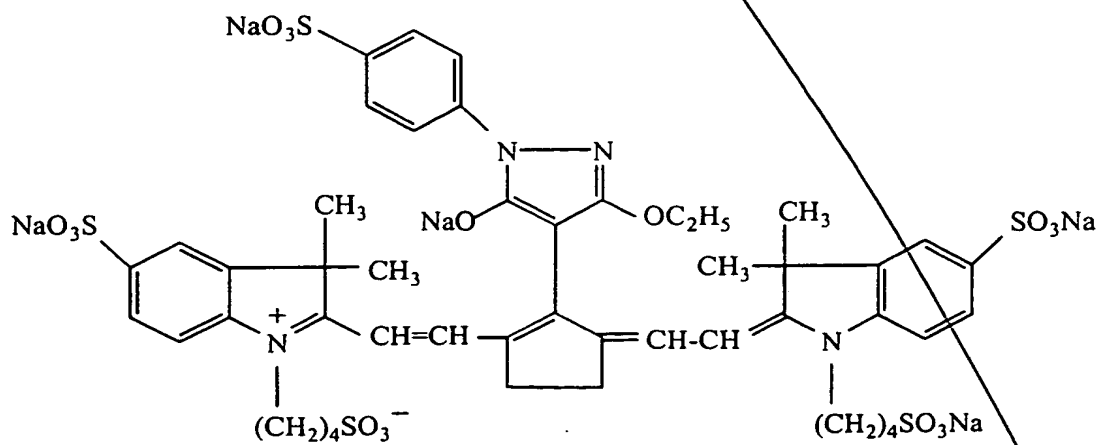
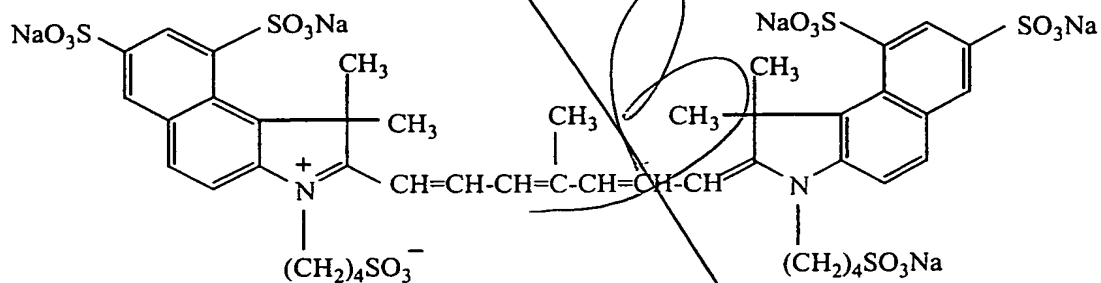
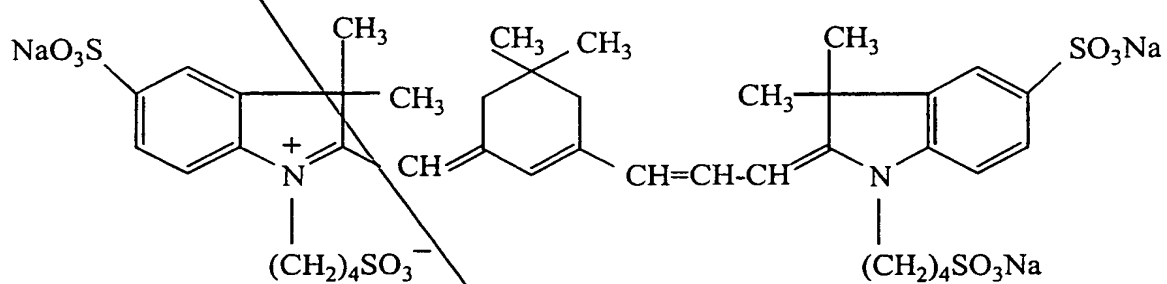
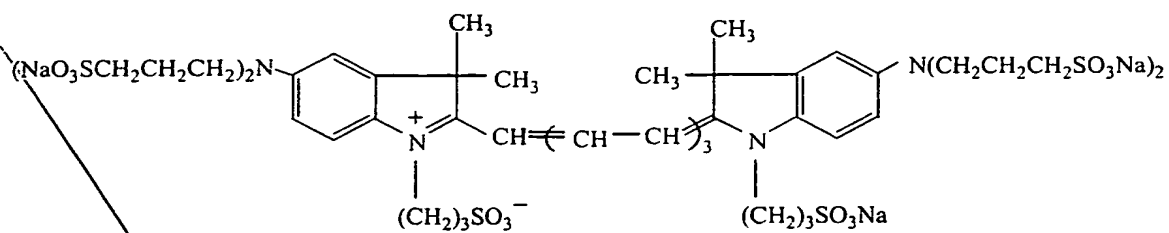
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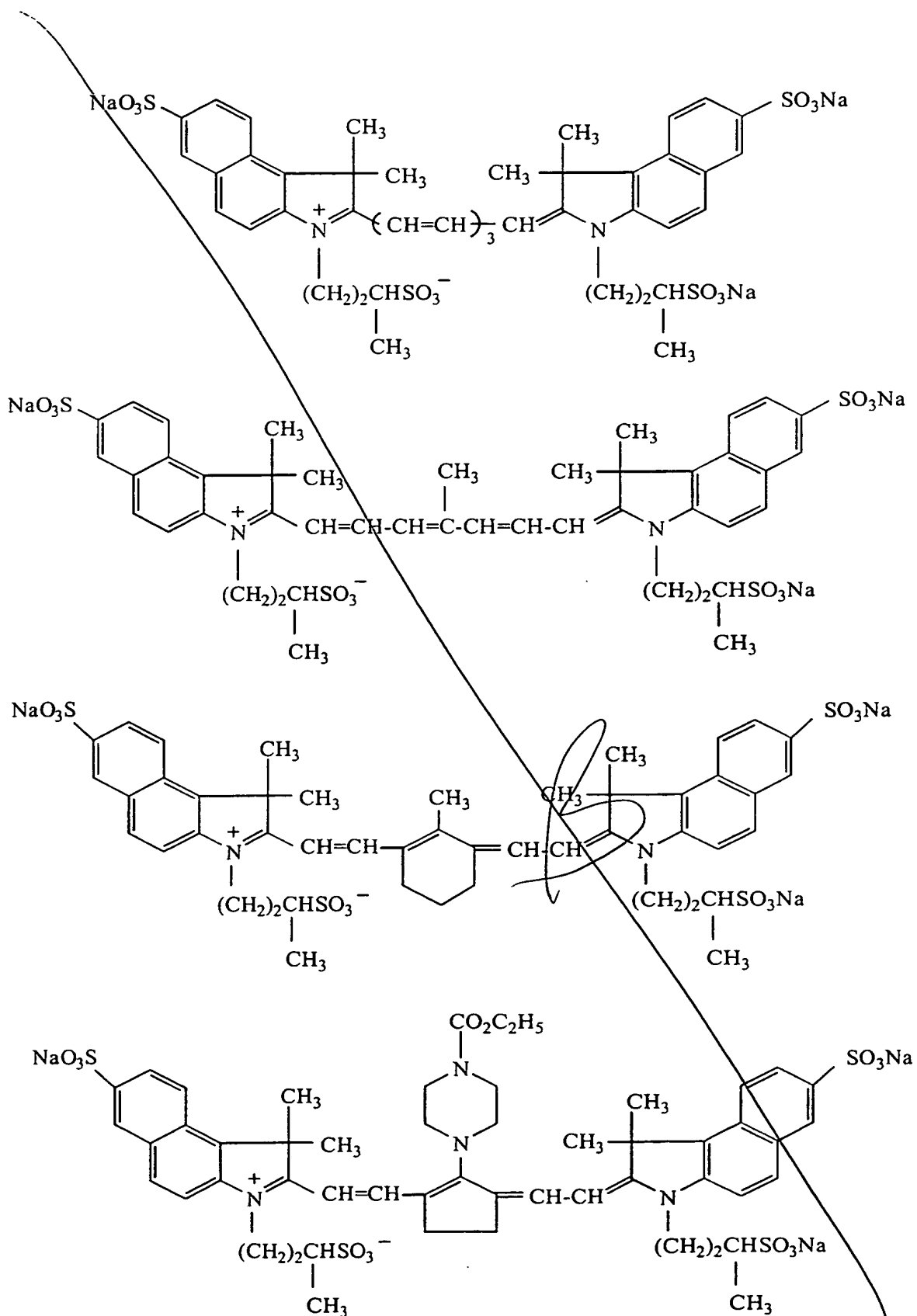


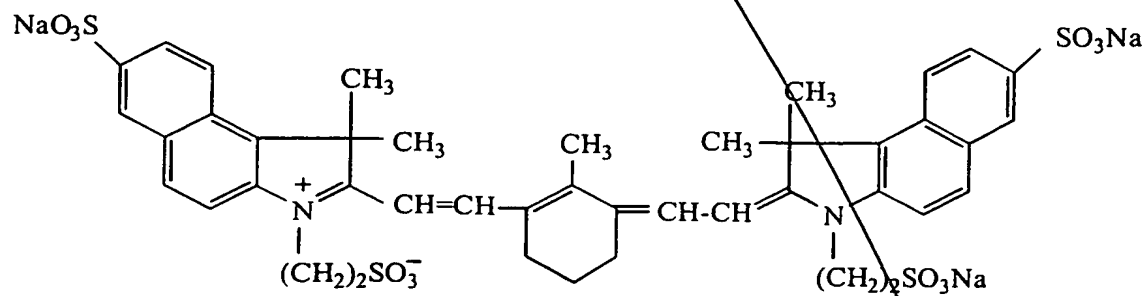
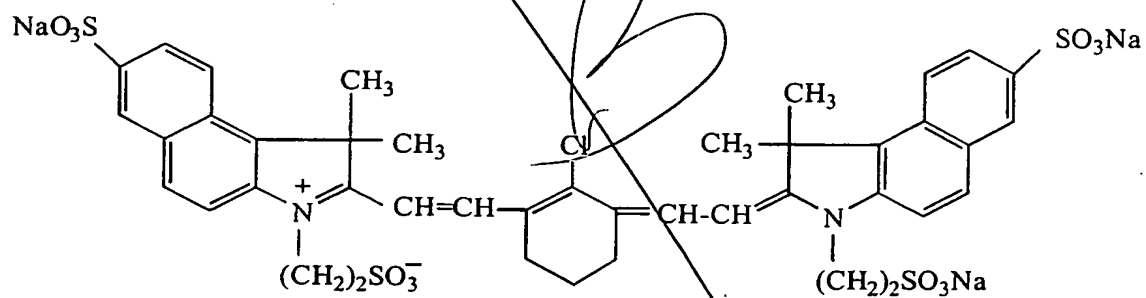
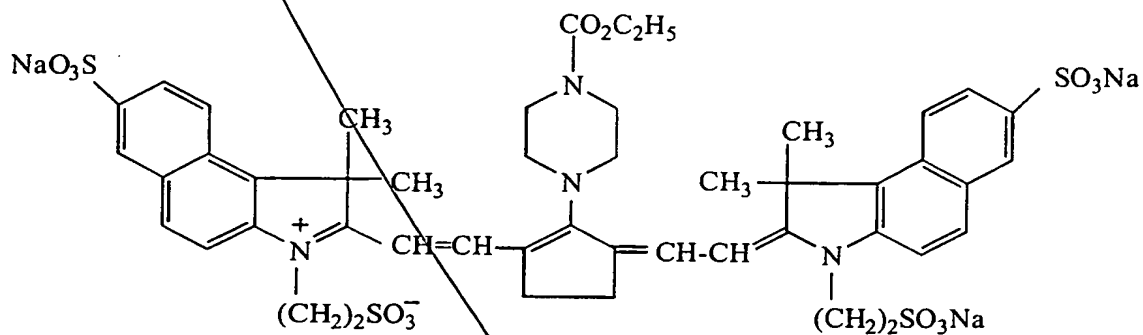
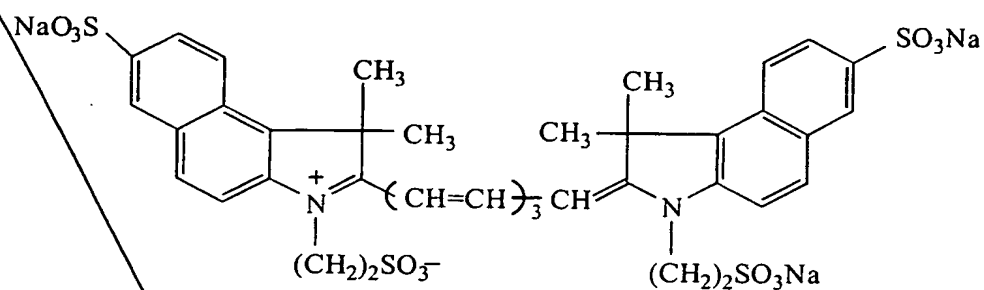
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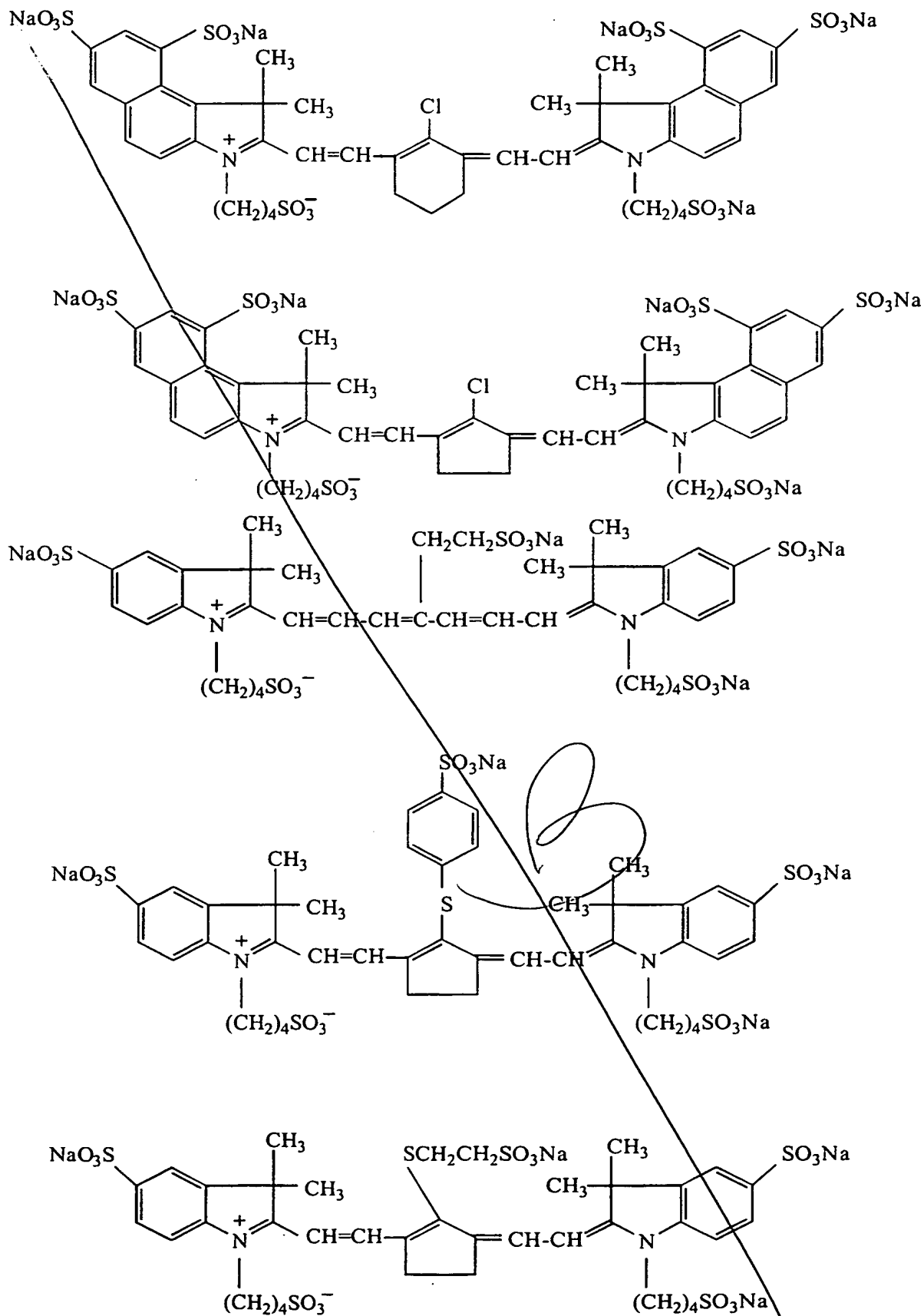
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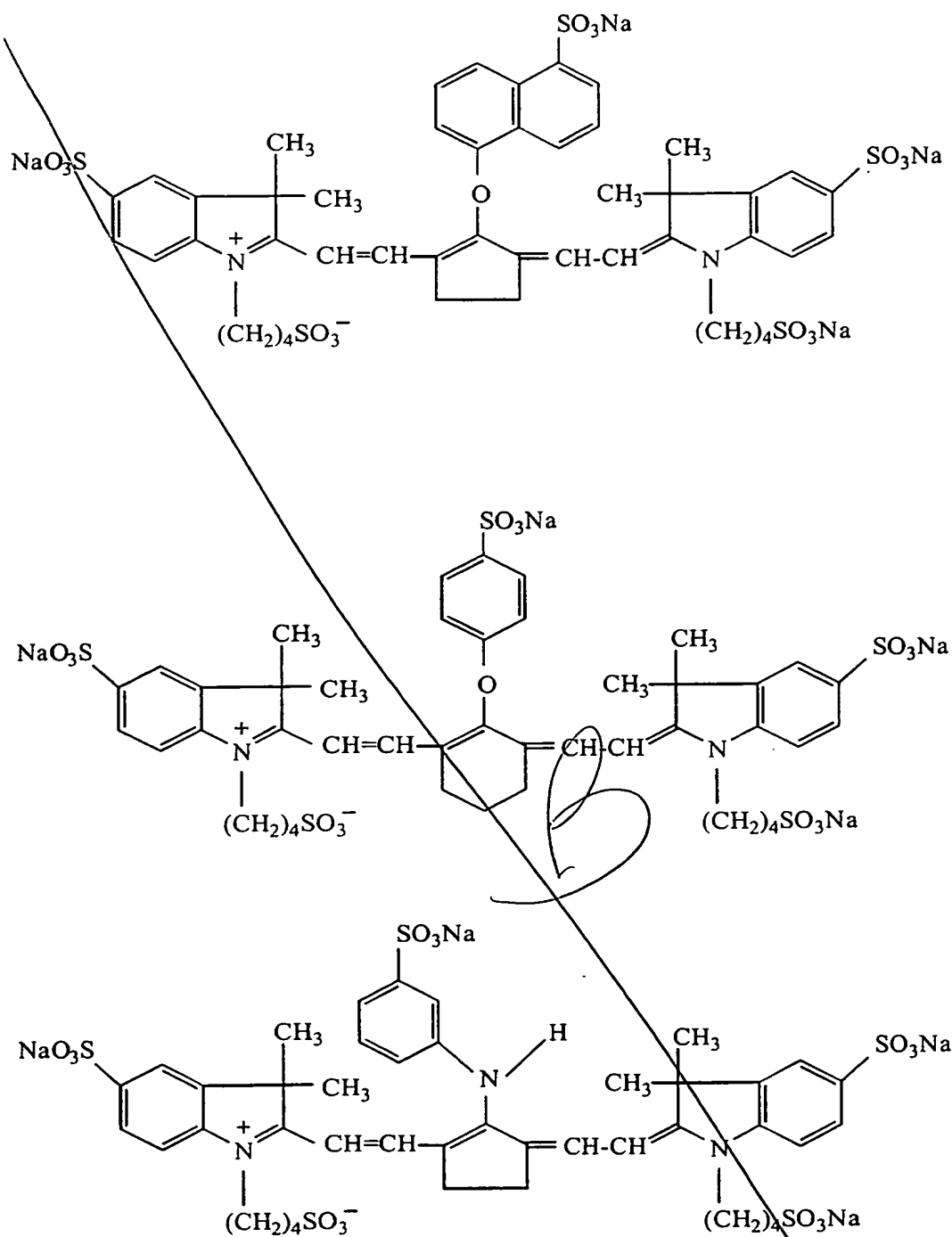


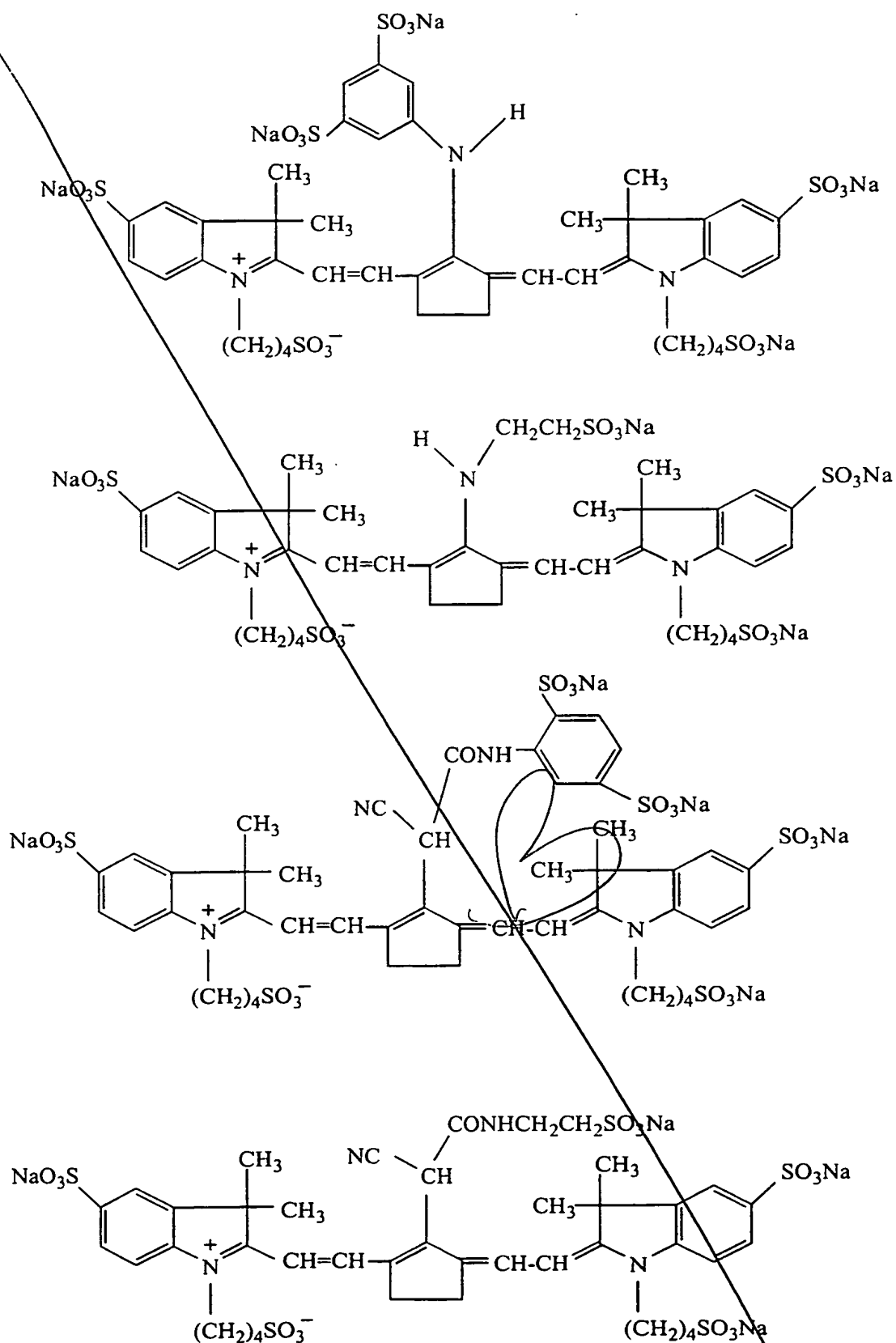


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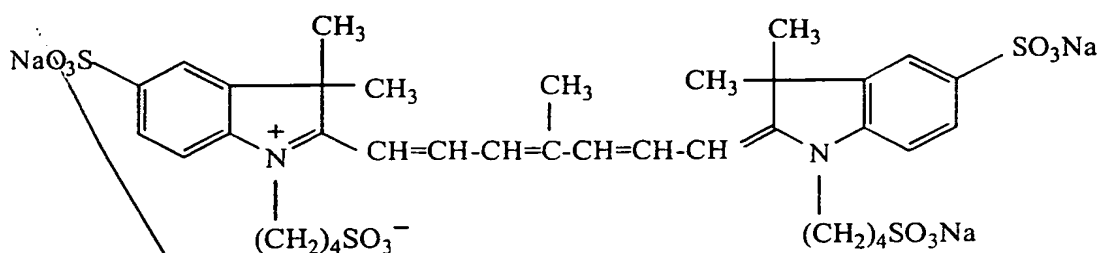


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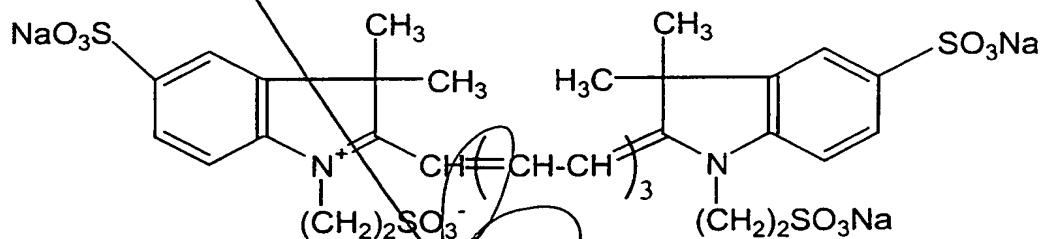




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and



28. The sodium salt of claim 15, wherein the monovalent group of A is substituted or unsubstituted alkyl, substituted or unsubstituted aryl, substituted or unsubstituted aralkyl, lower alkoxy, optionally substituted substituted amino, alkylcarbonyloxy, substituted or unsubstituted alkylthio, substituted or unsubstituted arylthio, cyano, nitro or halogen atom.

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